
“Lives of Legacy - Service to Christ Matters”

ROMANS 16:1-16

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AT A GLANCE

Paul’s closing words in Romans 16 reveal a heart devoted not only to Christ but also to the people who labored alongside him in the gospel. He honors men and women, rich and poor, known and unknown, for their faithfulness—reminding us that what we do for Christ matters and will leave a lasting legacy. This sermon challenges us to live in such a way that when our names are spoken, they are remembered for love, service, and a life poured out for the glory of God.

INTRODUCTION

There are two things I’d like us to glean from today’s passage, Paul’s conclusion to this letter: first, his affection for people. While his devotion to Jesus and the gospel was clear, he understood that ministry wasn’t just about the Word—it was about people. Ministry isn’t done in spite of people but *for* and *with* them.

Regardless their social status, Paul delighted to recognize the contributions of other people. Jews and Greeks, former slaves and social elite, men and women were all celebrated as having made significant contributions to the spread of the Gospel.

And second, the names in this passage represent lives of legacy; service to Christ matters. These couple of dozen people’s names have been handed down throughout the history of the church as faithful workers.

And since the Word will last forever, so will their names. But here’s the thing, what you do for Christ matters, too. We’re all building on the foundation of Christ and work done for Him will endure and will shine for eternity.

With these two things in mind, let’s stand and read today’s passage.

ROMANS 16:1-16

¹I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a servant of the church at Cenchreae, ²that you may welcome her in the Lord in a way worthy of the saints, and help her in whatever she may need from you, for she has been a patron of many and of myself as well. ³Greet Prisca and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, ⁴who risked their necks for my life, to whom not only I give thanks but all the churches of the Gentiles give thanks as well. ⁵Greet also the church in their house. Greet my beloved Epaphroditus, who was the first convert to Christ in Asia. ⁶Greet Mary, who has worked hard for you. ⁷Greet Andronicus and Junia, my kinsmen and my fellow prisoners. They are well known to the apostles, and they were in Christ before me. ⁸Greet Ampliatus, my beloved in the Lord. ⁹Greet Urbanus, our fellow worker in Christ, and my beloved Stachys. ¹⁰Greet Apelles, who is approved in Christ. Greet those who belong to the family of Aristobulus. ¹¹Greet my kinsman Herodion. Greet those in the Lord who belong to the family of Narcissus. ¹²Greet those workers in the Lord, Tryphena and Tryphosa. Greet the beloved Persis, who has worked hard in the Lord. ¹³Greet Rufus,

chosen in the Lord; also his mother, who has been a mother to me as well. ¹⁴ Greet Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermes, Patrobas, Hermas, and the brothers who are with them. ¹⁵ Greet Philologus, Julia, Nereus and his sister, and Olympas, and all the saints who are with them. ¹⁶ Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the churches of Christ greet you.

How was it possible that Paul knew so many people in Rome, having never been there? Two factors: first, travel was common in the Roman Empire, and second, many Jews, expelled from Rome in AD 49, had settled in regions where Paul ministered.

By the time they returned after the edict was lifted in AD 54, Paul had built relationships with many of them. This connection likely gave him confidence to write as he did, hoping the Roman church would support his mission.

PHOEBE, A SERVANT

Verses 1-2 I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a servant of the church at Cenchreae, ² that you may welcome her in the Lord in a way worthy of the saints, and help her in whatever she may need from you, for she has been a patron of many and of myself as well.

Phoebe was from **Cenchreae**, a port on the Saronic Gulf in Corinth. Paul probably knew her from his work with the church in Corinth.

She was a **servant of the church** there. The word **servant** is the Greek word *diakonos*, which has caused this verse to become hotly debated throughout church history. This is the same Greek word we translate deacon.

So was Phoebe a female deacon, a deaconess? Many conservative and reformed churches and theologians would say yes, Phoebe was a deaconess.

However, the term *diakonos* is usually translated in English as servant. Paul called himself a *diakonos*, servant, in several passages (1 Corinthians 3:5, 2 Corinthians 3:6 & 5:4, Colossians 1:23 & 25), he called Epaphras and Tychicus *diakonos* in Colossians 1:7 and Ephesians 6:21, respectively.

It was used to describe the government as a servant of God in Romans 13:4. And he even used the word to describe Jesus as a servant to the circumcised in Romans 15:8.

When the word *diakonos* is used in the New Testament, it is generally used to describe someone who serves the church or Christ, something everyone should aspire to do and be as we grow in the Lord.

Today's sermon is not primarily about the role of deacons in the church because that's not the primary concern of this passage. But, I will tell you that the elders are working on understanding the biblical role of deacons because we've been asked why we don't have them, at least by name.

The truth is, I'm not sure we're far from the New Testament church model. We have lots of servants in the church, both men and women, who tend to the work of ministry freeing up the elders to pray and preach and teach the Word. That seems to be the role of deacons in the first church, too.

A PATRON OF MANY

This is not to say that Phoebe had no special place in her church, though. There are faithful church members and then there are patrons. Phoebe was a **patron of many and myself as well**.

A patron is someone who stands next to you in the fight in every possible way; possibly lending financial support, but certainly morale support and physical assistance.

This was what Phoebe did for Paul and for many others. I thank the Lord for the Phoebe's in my life! She must have been one of Paul's most trusted companions and assistants if he entrusted her with the delivery of this letter. Consider the ramifications of this letter failing to reach the church!

Christian travelers were at the mercy of their fellow Christians to provide them food and shelter. This is why he not only commends Phoebe, but urges them to **welcome her in the Lord in a way worthy of the saints, and help her in whatever she may need from you**

That he entrusted this sacred task to Phoebe and commended her to them as if it were he himself delivering it, underscores the significance of women in the first church. She must have been a faithful, dependable, and dutiful assistant to Paul's apostolic ministry.

FELLOW WORKERS IN CHRIST

She deserved Paul's commendation, and he was happy to give it. But Paul wasn't finished singing the praise of women. In **verses 3-5a** Paul recognized a couple; note that he named the woman first.

Greet Prisca and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, ⁴who risked their necks for my life, to whom not only I give thanks but all the churches of the Gentiles give thanks as well. ⁵Greet also the church in their house.

This couple apparently returned to their home in Rome after being exiled in AD 49. Now they were back in Rome and Paul wanted to recognize their life-risking contributions.

Acts 18 records that Paul met them in Corinth and he remained with them for some time since they were all tent-makers. They not only worked together, but they also ministered together in Corinth and Ephesus. These were Paul's **fellow workers in Christ Jesus**.

It's unclear when or where or how they **risked their necks for [Paul's] life**; perhaps during the riots in Ephesus. (cf. Acts 19:21-30) It is noteworthy nonetheless and Paul says **all the churches of the Gentiles give thanks as well**; likely because they had been instrumental in Paul's work among them.

PEOPLE MATTER

Paul continues his greeting, remembering the first person he led to the Lord in Asia in **verse 5b Greet my beloved Epaenetus, who was the first convert to Christ in Asia**. Paul was the most significant missionary in the history of the church and he remembered his first convert in Asia by name. Remarkable!

There are six other Mary's in the New Testament, but none of them can be associated with the one named in **verse 6 Greet Mary, who has worked hard for you**.

When Paul used the term **worked hard**, it usually referred to the work of ministry in the service of the Lord. Mary served the Lord dutifully on behalf of the Roman church. What a legacy!

Paul continues in **verse 7 Greet Andronicus and Junia, my kinsmen and my fellow prisoners. They are well known to the apostles, and they were in Christ before me**.

Andronicus and Junia are otherwise not well known from scripture, but the apostles knew them well. By **apostle**, Paul means missionaries.

These, his **kinsmen**, were also **fellow prisoners**. By **kinsmen**, he probably means fellow Jews. But where did they share a prison? We cannot know for certain.

He was imprisoned in Philippi, but we don't read anything about Andronicus and Junia there. He may have been imprisoned in Ephesus. (cf. 2 Corinthians 1:8-11) If so, it may be that they were imprisoned there with him.

Paul turns up the pace in **verses 8-15** and so will we. He greets another twenty individuals, two families, and two groups of believers in these 8 verses.

RUFUS' MOTHER AND FATHER

One character in particular stands out to me. Who was this **Rufus** in verse 13? Before we get there, I want to point out what Paul says about his mother. She was a mother to him as well. That's all we

know about her. But how significant, to be known as a spiritual mother to the Apostle Paul. This must have been one special woman. What a legacy!

Now let's get back to Rufus. If he is the Rufus mentioned in Mark 15:21, he is the son of Simon of Cyrene, the very man who carried the cross of Christ. We know that Mark wrote his Gospel and sent it to the church in Rome, and was likely aware that Simon's sons were members of that church. How special that must have been to for them to hear their dad's name read aloud.

WHEN YOUR NAME IS READ

The fact is your sons and daughters will hear your name read aloud at least once. If at no other time, in your eulogy. What do you want to have said about you?

What do you want to be your legacy? Some people say, "I don't care about my legacy" as if it's virtuous. That's nonsense! Everyone leaves a legacy. Unfortunately, some are better forgotten.

I cannot recall how many funerals I have done in which the highest and best thing the family could say about their father is he was a hard worker. It's often said through a façade of honor that thinly veils the realization that my dad lived a superficial life. Don't get me wrong, hard work is virtuous. But it's not the highest and best thing to give your life to.

Few people wish they had worked harder when they're surrounded by their family on their deathbed. But plenty wish they had been more present.

And I wish more would realize they should have given themselves more to the work of Christ in the world and in their homes. Unfortunately, by the time it gets to me, it's too late. They're either deceased or will be very soon. But it's not too late for you.

How I wish that you would live your life in such a way that when your name is read the thing that people associate with it is service to Christ, whether that's as a husband or wife diligently striving to serve Christ in your marriage, as a father or mother dutifully and lovingly making disciples in your home, in your school or workplace working for the glory of God, as a member of a church committed to serving here, as a missionary serving abroad.

I wish we would all be like this unknown Mary of whom it simply says, she worked hard for you. Imagine this being said of you to a congregation, "he worked hard for you." Legacy. Ultimately, we work for the Lord. But don't miss this, these people in this passage let Christ use their lives for other people's sake.

I want you to be a person that truly lives your whole life for the glory of Christ. And being used by Jesus necessarily means working for and with people. And it's a glorious thing to give ourselves to hard work for others. That's a life of legacy! Service to Christ matters long after you're gone.

And you know how the Lord works, He gives back way more than we can give to Him. There is incredible joy in serving the Lord. Yes, it can be frustrating, and it can be taxing and frankly, we can get burned out if we're not ministering from the overflow of our own relationship with Christ.

But you know what, I look around and the people that I know are most sincerely committed to serving Christ by serving people are the happiest. They have the most joy. Their families are thriving. It's no coincidence.

I would just exhort you this morning to do something about your life so that when someone reads your eulogy, your faithful Christian family and friends will hear it without any regret, without any remorse, without any thought that your life could have been spent on something more lasting.

If you want to explore what it means to serve here at Wildwood, the simplest way is to approach the pastor or ministry leader of the area of service you feel you'd serve best. We can't make it happen for you. Lasting legacies aren't built easy. You need to step out in faith and initiate. Why not today?

IS THIS GOING TO GET WEIRD?

Finally, Paul urges us to **Greet one another with a holy kiss** in **verse 16**. My first thought was, “Do we really have to do this?!” Is this an apostolic command? And the answer is no. It’s not a command, it’s a custom.

It was customary in the church, especially after the Lord’s Supper, that the men would greet one another with a kiss on the cheek and the women would do the same with each other. It is still customary in parts of the world.

But at some point the western church moved away from it as a custom. We’ve replaced it with the “right hand of Christian fellowship,” a firm handshake. Or perhaps you prefer the “Christian side hug.”

Paul’s concern was that they demonstrate mutual care and affection for one another because what was front and center in Paul’s mind was unity among the body of Christ. That there would be warmth and hospitality among us.

ONE CHRIST, MANY CHURCHES

This leads us to our final greeting of this passage, **All the churches of Christ greet you**. There are many faithful **churches** in the world, but we all belong to one **Christ**. How Paul wished that what was true in fact would be true in practice.

As Paul closed his letter to the Romans, he left us with a powerful example of what it means to cherish and honor those who labor alongside us in ministry. His words remind us that the Christian life is not meant to be lived in isolation but in meaningful relationships marked by unity, love, service, and mutual encouragement.

May we, like Paul, recognize the value of the people God has placed in our lives and strive to leave behind a legacy of faithfulness, so that when our names are spoken, they are associated with devotion to Christ and His Church.

Nothing reminds us that there is one body and we are members of it, like communion.

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